**Objective:** Exploring the parable genre through writing

Parable: A **parable** is story, which illustrates one or more instructive principles, or lessons. It differs from a [fable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fable) in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters. It is a type of [analogy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analogy).

In *The Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck reports hearing a story in Baja that provided inspiration for *The Pearl*.

The tale is about an Indian boy who discovers a pearl of great size and value. He knows that its value

was such that he need never work again; he could be as slovenly and promiscuous as he wished. The

boy also saw in its value salvation, because he would be able to buy masses and an entrance into

heaven. The pearl buyers, however, offer such small prices that the boy refuses to sell. Finally, after

being attacked and beaten by robbers several times, he throws the pearl into the ocean. *The Pearl* takes

the original tale of the Pearl of the World and extends it, imbuing it with more meaningful lessons and

stronger characters.

This story’s lesson is clear: money cannot buy happiness, salvation, or wisdom. The story is a parable,

or a prose story told to illustrate a moral, religious, or philosophical idea. One of the best known

sources of parables is the Bible, in which Jesus uses them to relate moral lessons.

**Activity**

Write a parable that is two to five pages in length. You may use a familiar folk tale or fable as a starting

point for your story, or you may come up with something new. Your parable should express a moral

lesson without stating it directly. The theme should also be universal, as Steinbeck states in his preface,

“If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into

it.”